

News Release

Senators Pete Domenici & Jeff Bingaman

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N.M. SENATORS STAY ON COURSE FOR COMPREHENSIVE FIRE COMPENSATION BILL

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senators Pete Domenici and Jeff Bingaman today indicated that they will continue to work with the White House, New Mexico congressional delegation and the congressional leadership to develop comprehensive legislation to compensate victims of the Cerro Grande Fire.

The New Mexico Senators issued assurances of continued cooperation following the introduction of a compensation bill by Representative Tom Udall. On May 16, the entire New Mexico congressional delegation agreed to work together to facilitate fire recovery needs for the families, businesses, and local and tribal governments affected by the disastrous forest and wildfires raging throughout the state.

"I will continue to work with the delegation and the administration on comprehensive legislation that will have bipartisan and bicameral support. We want it to be something we can get through Congress as soon as possible with the support of the White House," Domenici said.

"I am very, very disappointed that Representative Udall has taken a separate path. This is very important legislation and involves some complicated legal issues. It cannot be rushed. The people who were affected by this terrible fire deserve more thought than taking a 25-year-old piece of legislation, changing references from a dam to a fire, replacing Idaho with New Mexico and calling it a credible, serious compensation bill."

"I plan to continue to work with the White House and the delegation to finalize legislation as quickly as possible. We want to get the legislation right the first time so that we avoid complications as we move the bill through Congress," Bingaman said. "My position has been to craft a bill that is detailed in its scope and provides the full funding necessary to compensate people for their losses. Our goal is to have a bill that is as tight and complete as possible so that we minimize the opportunity for others to attach amendments."

Last week, White House Chief of Staff John Podesta and Jack Lew, director of the Office of Management and Budget, committed Clinton administration assistance on a comprehensive and expedited claims and compensation package. Since then, the delegation has been working together to craft an aid bill that fits New Mexico's needs.